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National Intelligence Bulletin

State Dept. review completed

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May 19, 1975

No. 662

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Approved For Release 2007/03/06 : CIA-RDP79T00975A027700010032-9

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EGYPT-FEDAYEEN

A leading Egyptian columnist, Ihsan Abd al-Quddus, on May 16 urged the Palestine Liberation Organization to exclude itself from the Geneva conference in order to avoid giving the US and the Soviets an "excuse" to stop efforts toward achieving a peace settlement.

Quddus speaks for himself, and many of the views expressed in his column do not coincide with President Sadat's. He is close to the President, however, and his column clearly reflects Sadat's own frustrations with the PLO.

Quddus claimed that the US and the USSR have despaired of ever reconciling the Arab and Israeli positions and have therefore resolved to freeze the status quo. Both Washington and Moscow, he asserted, are determined to guarantee Israel's existence within its 1967 borders, and both look on the PLO's refusal to grant this recognition as an excuse to avoid convening the Geneva conference.

While stating his sympathy with its position, Quddus called on the PLO to accept a formula that could resolve the impasse but would effectively exclude the organization from negotiations. He urged that Jordan, Syria, or the Arab League be permitted to speak for the PLO at Geneva, on the understanding that West Bank territory regained through these negotiations would be turned over to the Palestinians.

Although Quddus' column blames the superpowers for the stalemate over the Palestinian issue, the implication of his remarks is that it is the PLO, rather than the superpowers or Israel, which must accommodate and compromise.

During his visits to four Arab states last week, Sadat made little effort to hide his dissatisfaction with the PLO's indecisiveness on whether and under what representational formula to attend the Geneva conference. Asked during a press conference in Kuwait how he would resolve the issue, Sadat replied somewhat peevishly that the question might better be asked of the Palestinians themselves, as they have not yet even decided whether to go to Geneva. At a later press conference in Jordan, Sadat referred to his fruitless efforts last year to resolve the Palestinian representation issue and, without saying so directly, implied that the PLO's rejection of his proposals last year has prolonged the impasse.

Sadat undoubtedly tried again during his visits to gain Arab support for a formula that would obscure PLO presence at Geneva. He also met with PLO Chairman Yasir Arafat yesterday in Damascus; there is no indication that he succeeded with the PLO.

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SYRIA

Syria's ambassador to the UN has told some of his colleagues there that he is confident Damascus will authorize a two-month renewal of the UN Disengagement Observer Force mandate on the Golan Heights. The mandate expires on May 31, and UN Security Council officials expect a council debate on the issue early next week.

The Syrians have not officially signaled their intentions, but we believe they will extend the mandate to coincide with Egypt's extension of the UN mandate on the Sinai front until late July. The statements of Syria's UN ambassador follow a number of reports over the past several weeks that Syria favors aligning its policy on this issue with Egypt's.

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PORTUGAL

Radical officers in the Armed Forces Movement, having forced the resignation of air force chief of staff Mendes Dias last week, may soon move to push additional moderates off the ruling Revolutionary Council.

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The issue may be tied to further investigations of the abortive coup of last March. Press reports indicate that the assembly is to discuss the formation of an as yet undefined mass movement—an "alliance between the military and the people." Also on the agenda is a proposal by Admiral Rosa Coutinho, a key member of the Revolutionary Council, to form a tribunal to judge those implicated in the coup attempt, both military officers and civilians. If the proposal is passed, some moderate officers may be forced to resign.

For the radicals to succeed, they must be able to control the votes of the 240-member assembly. Although the assembly is probably more left-wing than its predecessor, which was restructured after the coup attempt, the radicals will have difficulty overcoming the widespread respect Costa Gomes has within the armed forces.

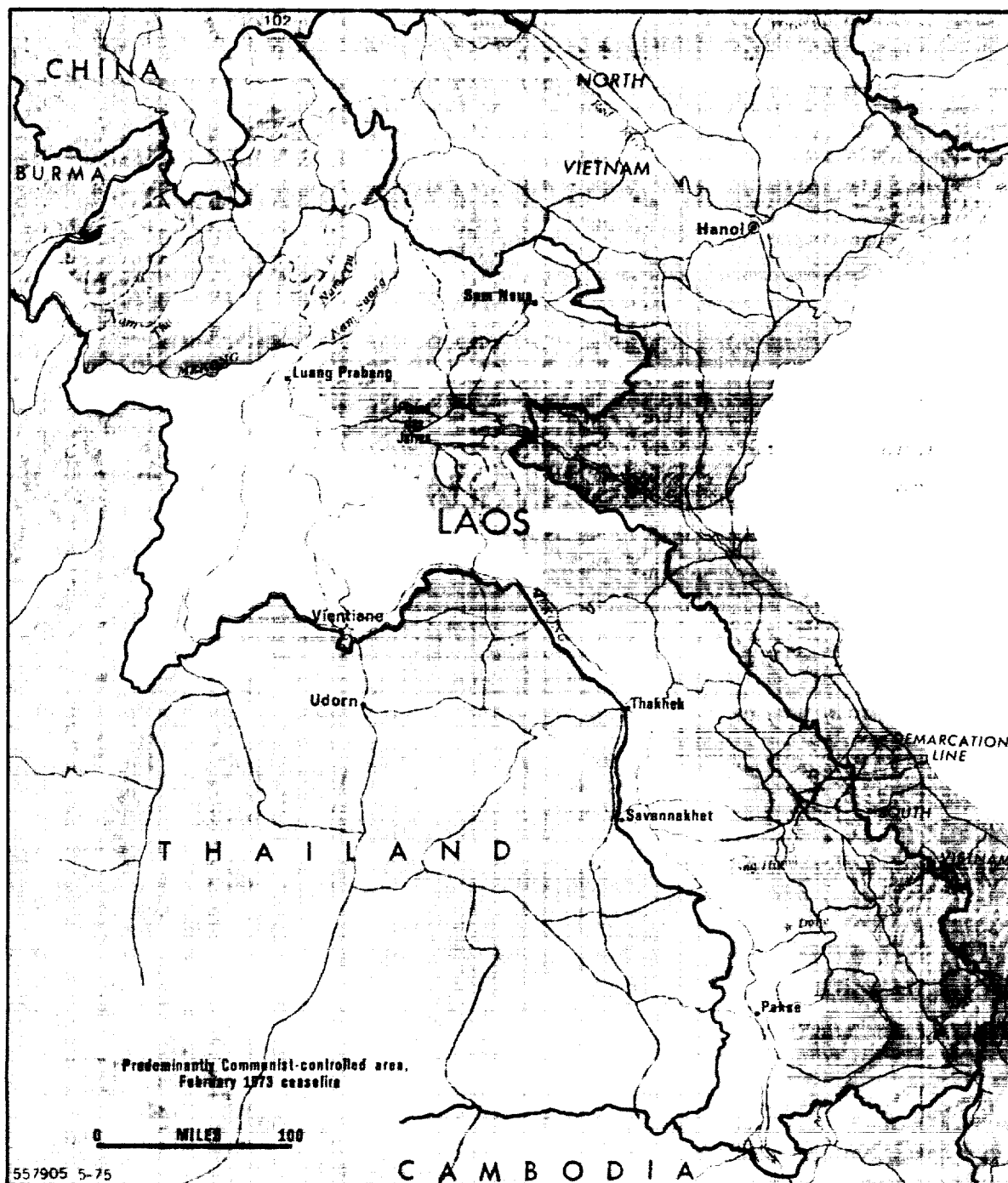
Costa Gomes has usually remained neutral in political disputes and has emerged unscathed from past power struggles. He may have made himself less acceptable to radical elements, however, by making statements about the constituent assembly election that were widely interpreted as pro-Socialist. Furthermore, there are continuing reports that he has serious health problems.

If Costa Gomes is forced out, a possible successor is Admiral Rosa Coutinho, who has been waiting to move into a top position.

Members of a left-wing army unit, in a broadcast yesterday over the national radio, announced that they had discovered a major counterrevolutionary plot and urged all military units to join in a manhunt. The communique did not name any of the so-called plotters, but posters identified two of them as a director of the Social Democratic Center party and a Supreme Court judge. A military spokesman refused to confirm or deny reports that the armed forces have been placed on full alert.

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LAOS

No major demonstrations occurred in Vientiane over the weekend. Some 200 to 250 people did stage a peaceful "victory celebration" at the former South Vietnam embassy, which has been taken over by North Vietnamese diplomats.

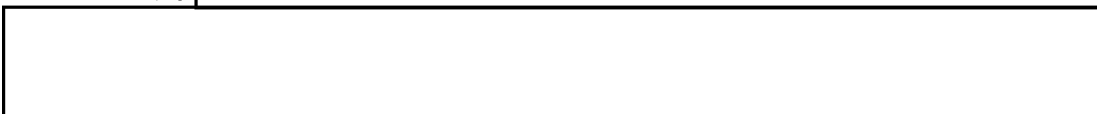


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The situation at Savannakhet has not changed significantly. Three AID officials and their families remain under a loose form of "voluntary house arrest." The senior AID official under "detention" reported by radio to the US embassy in Vientiane yesterday that the 12 Americans in Savannakhet, along with a number of other foreigners, did not feel threatened. He also indicated that their movements now are somewhat less restricted.

Negotiations between the demonstrators and coalition representatives aimed at the Americans' release were scheduled to begin last Friday, but the two cabinet ministers involved—Pheng and Deuane—still have not left Vientiane. Deuane is reluctant to go to Savannakhet, reportedly fearing that rightist supporters of recently ousted Prince Boun Oum na Champassak plan to kidnap him upon his arrival.

In Thakhek, meanwhile, demonstrations by several hundred students, soldiers, policemen, civil servants, and unemployed laborers are continuing. The protests, apparently nonviolent, are directed against the AID compound and the local public works office.



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THAILAND

Thai Foreign Minister Chatchai has expressed satisfaction with the US note on the use of Thai bases during the Mayaguez incident.

Chatchai told reporters in Bangkok that he considered the note "a formal apology" because it reaffirmed US respect for Thai sovereignty and indicated that such use of Thai bases would not recur. Radiobroadcasts from Bangkok have also described the note as an "apology."

Student-led demonstrations at the US embassy remained peaceful over the weekend. Several thousand protesters gathered outside the embassy over the weekend, but the crowd had dwindled to a handful by this morning. Before the US note was delivered, student leaders had alerted colleagues in the countryside to join in the protest, and Thai trade union representatives had discussed plans for disrupting American-owned businesses and US agencies.

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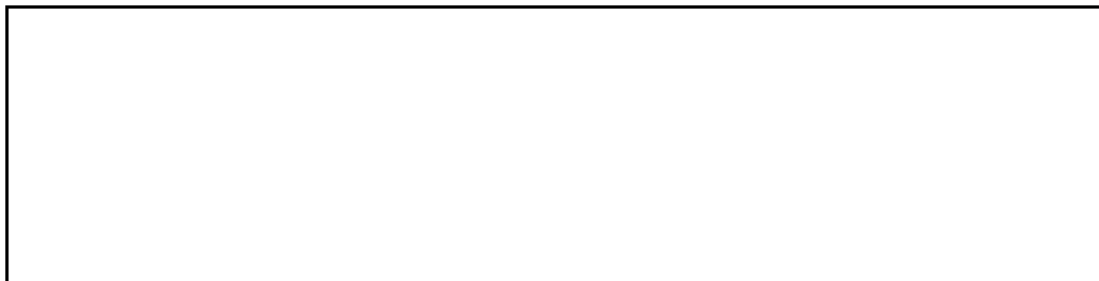
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CAMBODIA

Phnom Penh has issued several statements in the aftermath of the Mayaguez incident alleging that US bombings against facilities on the mainland and the landings on Koh Tang occurred after the Cambodians had "returned all members of the American crew." Phnom Penh has also broadcast official thanks for international support for its "cause." The Cambodians singled out Algeria by name, saying that it "alone" had issued a statement of support.

Prince Sihanouk—who earlier had refused to comment on the incident—told journalists in Peking yesterday that he fully supported Phnom Penh's handling of the affair. Sihanouk quoted from a cable of congratulations he had sent to Deputy Prime Minister Khieu Samphan on Saturday. He made his comments before leaving for a good-will visit to North Korea.

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Sihanouk is obviously finding his long wait humiliating, but there is still every sign that he will return as soon as he gets the green light from Phnom Penh.

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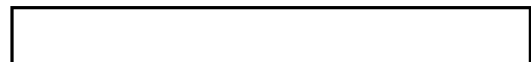
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